What Color?

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WHAT COLOR?

What Color?

OR SUGGESTIONS REGARDING THE SELECTION AND HARMONIOUS ARRANGEMENT OF COLORS FOR PAINTING BUILDINGS, BEING A GUIDE TO THE INEXPERIENCED.

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THE SHERWIN-WILLIAMS CO.
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CLEVELAND & CHICAGO.

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INTRODUCTION.

SINCE the Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia, in 1876, which brought to our shores representatives from many countries with their art and mechanical work, we as a nation have obtained enlarged views of, and have made commendable progress in, the knowledge which identifies us with the better evidences of civilization. To this period, or to one not remote from it, and particularly to the Exposition itself, we may trace a new energy, which has awakened a deep interest in architecture and the hitherto somewhat neglected decorative arts. This developing and cumulative force has brought us much in the shape of absurd ornament and æsthetic affectation, which must be weeded out before the soil from which it springs can grow a better crop; but as the preparatory process goes on, the pulsations of

the expanding power of knowledge are felt. The old thoughts, the old methods, are pushed aside for those which are truer to nature, truer to our own sensibilities, truer to the intelligent purposes which should be given to the product of human skill. In no direction has this tendency toward improvement been more noticeable than in its effect upon architecture and decoration. These sister arts are winning more and more the confidence and admiration of the people—the one presenting economy and convenience of arrangement with beauty of form, and the other accentuating this structural beauty with beauty of harmonious color. Cut loose from the dull conservatism which dare use none but white and neutral colors for exterior decoration, this later impulse takes the entire color scale and extends it into and beyond the secondaries and tertiaries in order to feast the eye upon the best effects. And it is of deep interest—this subject of color as

applied to buildings—to decorators, to owners of buildings, and to the public generally.

The purpose of this little pamphlet is to take up the subject of color in its application to architecture, and that mainly to the exterior coloring of such buildings as are usually painted, and to show that, aside from the dictates of custom, there are excellent reasons why strong, positive colors should be used, and how essential in their use is a knowledge of harmonious combinations. It is one of the adverse experiences of this new desire for beautiful exteriors that many have been disgusted by the miserable attempts of persons entirely ignorant of the laws of harmony to form combinations; and, though admiring strong colors, were unable to secure a satisfactory arrangement.

So important is this subject in its commercial, social and domestic bearings upon our national life that we have often wondered why the

attention of boards of education and superintendents of instruction in our public schools has not been called to it. If the children in our schools were taught the theory and law of color with half the care that is given to other branches of knowledge, the succeeding generations would not be groping in the dark as the present one seems to be.

The impression is common among a class that the choice and arrangement of colors is a mere matter of taste, and that good or bad taste attaches to the natural condition of the eye. This is only partially true. Natural perception and taste are essential, but are valuable chiefly as auxiliaries to a *thorough knowledge* of the laws of harmony. Some person who has not given this matter any attention may ask, "How am I to get this knowledge? What books are to be had on this subject?" Those really desirous of learning will find in the writings of Chevreul, Field, Dresser, and a

few others, a thorough treatment of the subject. Other works easily obtained give the theory in outline. The succeeding chapter in this little pamphlet gives in condensed form facts enough to enable any person of reasonable intelligence, with a little experimenting, to form right opinions of color effects.

The writer does not presume to possess an entire mastery of this subject, but business circumstances and personal inclination have led to a more or less extensive study of it; and more recently the numerous requests from correspondents for suggestions with regard to the selection of colors for painting buildings, from nearly every part of the country, have absorbed so much of his time, that he has found it impossible to comply with all, and has endeavored to embody in the following pages such general information as will enable any one to select and arrange colors properly.

COLOR.

1. The color of a substance is that color of the prismatic spectrum which it reflects to our eyes. A substance appears blue because it reflects blue rays only and absorbs all others. White reflects and black absorbs all rays.

2. The natural eye is so constructed that it is not satisfied with inharmonious coloring.

3. Harmony is an arrangement of colors in agreeable contrast.

4. The harmony of color is analogous to the harmony of music, but the analogy is not generally understood.

5. Harmony is only secured when the three primary colors, blue, red and yellow are present in proper proportions, either alone or in combinations.

6. Primary colors cannot be formed by the admixture of any other colors, while all other colors result from the admixture of these three.

7. Colors formed by the admixture of two primaries are called secondary, those formed by the admixture of two secondaries are called tertiary.

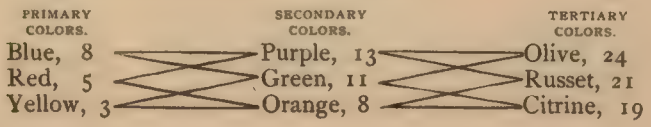
8. Red and green combine to yield harmony, because green is formed by uniting blue and yellow.

9. Blue and orange combine to yield harmony, because orange is formed by uniting red and yellow.

10. Yellow and purple produce harmony, because purple is formed by uniting red and blue.

11. Colors in perfect purity produce exact harmonies in the proportions of eight parts of blue, five of red and three of yellow.

12. The law of harmonious combinations may be expressed as follows:



13. To illustrate harmony by rule :

Red, IIIII. Blue, II.	Bluish crimson harmonizes with yellow green.	Yellow, III. Blue, IIIIII.

The bluish crimson is formed by all the red (5), and two parts of the blue. The yellow green is formed by all the yellow (3), and the remaining six parts of blue, thus we have used the lawful proportions, eight blue, five red, and three yellow.

14. The areas occupied by different colors may vary with corresponding variation in intensity. For instance, blue (8), and orange (8), form perfect harmony when both are of prismatic intensity, and we still have perfect harmony when the orange is reduced to one-half its strength with white or black, provided sixteen parts are now used with the eight of blue.

15. Colors are inherent and transient; the former any colored substance, the latter decomposed rays of light.

16. Pigments are imperfect representations of color, therefore *absolutely* harmonious combinations can never be produced with paints.

17. When colors are juxtaposed (placed side by side), they are influenced and do not appear what they really are.

18. Whatever primary color is not in view will be created in the eye, and this induced color will be cast upon whatever is near.

19. Colors which perfectly harmonize improve one another, and are thus complementary.

20. Inharmonious combinations are by juxtaposition rendered still more inharmonious; for instance, blue and purple are both injured when placed side by side.

21. Complementary colors in juxtaposition mutually enrich each other, receiving a double modification first as to depth, the light appearing lighter, the dark darker and second as to

hue, each being tinged with the complementary color of the other.

22. When a light color is juxtaposed to a dark one the light color appears lighter and the dark one darker than it really is.

23. Dark gray on white appears much darker than it really is.

24. When red and green are juxtaposed the red will appear redder and the green greener than otherwise, because they, too, contain the three primaries and are complementary.

25. When blue or bluish black are juxtaposed to jet black the first is slightly improved while the jet black appears rusty from the orange tint created by the eye, the other two primaries, red and yellow, forming the orange.

26. If we look upon red, green is formed in the eye, and if we look upon yellow, purple (blue and red) is formed, the induced colors affecting those in juxtaposition.

27. By any artificial light (as gas), blue

becomes darker, red brighter, and yellow lighter than it is.

28. Gray increases the brilliancy of all primary colors when in juxtaposition with them. Cobalt, raw umber and white produce a good gray.

29. Blue is a cold, receding color. Red is a warm, exciting (but stationary) color. Yellow is an advancing color.

30. Colors may be combined to produce the idea of gladness, sadness, purity, richness, poverty, etc., analogous to the sounds of music.

EXTERIOR COLORING.*

BUILDINGS to be painted should be considered as only a part of a picture—*i. e.*, the surroundings should be first taken into account, and if they are fixed, we must work to them. First, the building itself: Is the painter at liberty to cover all that is in sight—roofs, foundations, chimneys, etc.? In this connection, the color of curtains or shutters to be shown through the windows should be taken into account. Outside of the building itself, we begin with the sky; that, we of course cannot control. It is considered blue or gray, and as we cannot control the change in the seasons we must

*The numbers used in this pamphlet to designate colors are identical with the numbers used to designate the colors of THE SHERWIN-WILLIAMS PAINT. The numbers between 350 and 400 represent the regular colors, as ready for immediate use. The numbers from 782 upward represent

consider whether the building is to be more than half the time subject to the dazzling contrast of snow, or for the most of the year in contrast with green foliage; also, that which is still more difficult to control, the colors on buildings in close proximity belonging to other people.

Gradation is good, and contrast is good, but we must not have too much sameness. Neither should we have such contrasts as to make the building too conspicuous.

We learn that the primary colors, blue, yellow and red, when used in certain proportions complement each other and produce perfect harmony, but it would be absurd to paint a

the combination colors, produced by simply mixing two or more of the regular colors, as per directions given on pages 33 and 34 of a descriptive sample pamphlet issued by the publishers, which will be mailed free on application. These are mixed by the consumers, and are never carried in stock. The painter is thus enabled to vary the colors, if desired, by a change of proportions.

house with those colors in full strength, even if its surrondings were in harmony with them. These primary colors must be toned down and used mainly in the numberless ways they appear in secondary, tertiary, etc.

It has been almost a universal custom to first choose a body color, then a darker color for trimming. This is quite proper in many plain styles of architecture, but most of the modern and elaborately finished, as well as many of the older styles of buildings, seem to require several colors, adapted as to strength of color, to suit the architecture. Where it is desired to bring out or fully preserve the structural design, the projecting parts, called high lights, should be lighter in color than the receding or sunken parts, called shadows. Again, we should bear in mind that the parts nearest the ground should, by the use of darker colors, be made to look heavier than the higher parts, which, by the use of lighter colors, pre-

vent the structure from appearing top-heavy. Taking the various tints and shades of THE SHERWIN-WILLIAMS PAINT, one by one in the order they chance to be numbered, we suggest other numbers which may be appropriately used for trimming:

351.

This shade has been extensively used for several years past for obvious reasons. It is neither very light nor very dark; it is clear, not too positive; indeed, it is almost neutral, and looks well on a large variety of structures. It admits of the use of quite a variety of shades and tints for trimming. Those most used are Nos. 356, 353, 352, 357 and 375, the two former when but one trimming color is used, as on very plain buildings; but in such cases 357 and 352 could be used with equally good results where more than one trimming color

can be used, and there is seldom a case where it cannot. We advise using both the light and dark, as suggested heretofore, for high lights and shadows. 375 would be just the thing to use on ceilings of porches and on certain parts of fancy gables, etc. Combination Nos. 790, 783, 792 and 791 are even more suitable than the previously named, 790 and 783, both or either one, on the general trimmings, as cornices, casings, etc. 792, in some cases, could be used as the principal trimming, but more often in connection with 783. 791 could only be used for high lights or certain panels and gables in the more modern styles of buildings. Outside blinds, if any, may be green, 362; but we would prefer using two of the trimming colors used on the house, the deepest tone for slats, and the lightest for frames. Roofs may be painted any dull red or brown, as 363, 370, etc.

352.

This is, perhaps, the choicest of the semi-neutral shades we show; there is a peculiar softness and beauty to it not easily explained, but universally admired. It is trimmed with about the same shades and tints as 351. Nos. 357, 356, 351, 353, 355 and 354 are most used. Nos. 375, 790, 791 and 792 are also used where the architecture is appropriate. Trimming color may be used on the blinds and roof, reddish brown, say 370.

353.

We will give no details for trimming this, because we do not think it is, as a rule, a suitable body color, but is very useful in trimming, especially suitable for porch floors, treads of steps, etc., where the building is painted a light color.

354.

A very fashionable tint within the past three or four years. No. 355 is used to trim more than anything else. No. 371 is also used for the deeper shadows, foundations, etc. Nos. 360, 352 and 375 are also suitable trimming colors; the latter makes a very pretty contrast with this, as with all colors of the green order; reds—terra cottas and orange shades—are harmonious contrasts. The trimming color may be used on outside blinds, in which case, if roofs are prominently visible they should be red; if not, we would advise that blinds be 787, or some similar color.

355.

Another even more desirable color than the preceding, because it admits of more positive trimmings, and consequently a more satisfactory result. It is most often trimmed with 371, as seen on all the station houses of the Nickel Plate railway, for which we first designed the colors. Nos. 354, 352 and 357 are also used to trim it, but, as suggested above, are not so suitable as the more positive shades, 372, 367, 787, 798, 790 and 802. The two latter should be used for the ordinary trimmings, and the others for shadows, chamfers, inside of scrolls, shutters, etc. When the reds can be used in trimming, the roof, if visible, should be some shade of red or red-brown.

356.

A very good color, but not quite so largely used as a body color as before the introduction of more positive shades. Among the best trimming colors, we name 351, 352, 790, 792 and 802. Blinds look best painted with same colors as those used for other trimmings; roofs brown. When porch floors and steps are to be painted, 796 will be found very suitable.

357.

This is one of the best light neutral tints shown. Nos. 360, 359, 353, 351, 352, 790 and 792 are most useful trimming colors. If desired, 362, green, may be used for blinds and red for roof, with good effect.

359.

A lighter tint than the last, and admits of the use of 360, 353, 351, 352, 375, 790, 791 and 792 for trimming; blinds and roofs same as for 357.

360.

This, in our opinion, is the choicest of all the light semi-neutral tints shown. Its excellence is in the soft tone it possesses, and when a building is completed with this as a body color the effect is peculiarly restful. Trimming colors should be selected from the following: 375, 354, 357, 351, 352, 791, 792, 790 and 798. For porch floors, treads of steps, etc., 353 is suitable, but a darker shade (say 796) can be used with equal harmony. Outside blinds should have two shades of the trimming colors selected, or green (No. 362), if desired; roof, 363 or 370.

361.

We could name several tints which would harmonize with this, but shall not, simply because we never recommend it as a body color. It has been quite largely used and will continue to be, but we never liked it.

366.

This, while one of the richest house colors ever produced, is too dark to be generally used for the entire body of a house. It is quite suitable, and is largely used on the first or lower story of buildings having a belting course to separate the stories; used in this way, the next story should be a lighter shade of the same order, or one of suitable contrast, as No. 368. Other colors used to trim this are Nos. 369, 371, 372, 801, 800 and 792, the two or three last mostly used in gables and for high lights. When this is used on a large part of

the house and some of the yellowish shades with it, the roof should be green to give a harmonious contrast. No. 795, which is intended as an imitation of green slate, answers the purpose very well. This 366 is the favorite for outside of sash when black is not used, as it of course should be when 366 is not in harmonious contrast with the adjoining colors, and may most always be with good effect.

367.

This is, in all respects, the best red for the body of a house, in that it does not fade or change as much as any other, and is neither too bright nor too dull. Olives and greens contrast best for trimmings. Nos. 368, 371 and 369 are those most used. In some cases 372, 798, 801 and 792 are also used, all depending upon the architecture. A green slate roof is in best harmony.

368.

This is one of the most popular dark shades for house painting. For a contrasting trimming, Nos. 367, 366, 787 and 788 are most used, while Nos. 800, 801 and 802 are used where the architecture will admit. No. 369 is very appropriate for base, foundations, etc.

369.

While this is a very fashionable shade for bodies of some modern buildings, it is too dark for extended use. A modern house which admits of a different shade of color on each story, looks well with this color on first story, 368 on second, and a careful selection of the reds and yellows for trimming. Nos. 366, 367, 787, 788, 802, 801 and 800 are those most used; roofs should be painted with No. 370.

371.

Among the best trimming colors for this are Nos. 366, 367, 372, 787, 788, 790, 800, 801 and 802. Roofs, 370 or 363.

372.

This is a very desirable color, destined to be used more and more as people overcome their prejudice to new positive colors. It is a color admitting of a large choice of colors for trimming. We name the following to select from: 366, 367, 371, 368, 369, 355, 353, 370, 374, 787, 788, 789, 790, 795, 900, 801 and 802. The trimmings chosen must be such as to give a good strong contrast.

375.

This tint is often used with good effect, but is subject to some of the same objections we have to white; it is rather too glaring or bright. Yellow tints show for all they are worth, and if used, the surroundings must be most carefully considered. The following numbers can be used for trimming: 360, 369, 361, 357, 351, 352, 356, 354, 355, 353 and 362.

COMBINATION COLORS.

Inasmuch, as in designating suitable trimming for what we term REGULAR COLORS, a very good idea has been given why and when certain colors should be used; therefore, in naming trimming colors for the following Combination Colors, we shall simply give numbers of such colors as, in their proper place, may safely be used, leaving the reader to judge something for himself from the foregoing details:

BODY. TRIMMING.

No. 782—Nos. 366, 368, 369, 372, 365; 785, 783, 792, 801, 802, 800, 787, 788.

No. 783—Nos. 372, 368, 365, 366; 785, 792, 800, 802, 787, 788.

No. 784—Nos. 365, 368, 372; 792, 800, 802, 787, 788, 789, 798, 801.

No. 785—Nos. 372, 371, 368, 366, 365; 783, 792, 800, 802, 787, 788, 789.

No. 786—Nos. 368, 371, 365; 792, 800, 802, 787, 788, 801, 784.

BODY. TRIMMING.

No. 787—Nos. 372, 371, 368, 366, 365; 783, 784, 785, 788, 792, 794, 798, 800.

No. 788—Nos. 372, 368, 365, 371, 369; 784, 798, 800, 792, 783, 785, 794, 787.

No. 789—Nos. 372, 371, 368, 369, 365; 792, 800, 786, 785, 794, 784, 798, 783.

No. 790—Nos. 371, 372, 365; 791, 783, 802, 787, 788, 792, 800, 801.

No. 791—Nos. 351, 352, 356, 355, 371, 372; 790, 783, 798, 794.

No. 793—Nos. 368, 372; 783, 785, 794, 798, 784, 786, 792, 787, 788, 800, 801, 802.

No. 794—Nos. 372, 366, 368; 783, 785, 782, 801, 800, 802, 787, 788.

No. 795—Nos. 372, 368, 366; 801, 800, 802, 787, 788.

No. 798—Nos. 372, 368; 792, 783, 785, 790, 801, 800, 802, 787, 788.

No. 800—Nos. 356, 372, 371, 368; 790, 783, 785, 798, 784, 794, 795, 801, 787, 788.

No. 801—Nos. 372, 368, 371; 790, 802, 787, 788, 784, 794.

No. 802—Nos. 372, 368, 371, 356; 790, 785, 801, 795, 794, 784.

INTERIOR DECORATION.

It may be expected by those who have found the foregoing instructions helpful, that as much and as full suggestions could be given for coloring interiors, but to all such we can only say we shall disappoint you. The subject is too large for any such treatment as has been given exteriors. Much we have said will apply to this phase of decoration also, because the law of harmony is unchanging, and all we have written has been based upon that law. Another reason why it is not within our province to enter into the details of interior decoration, is because we cannot well specify colors for painting woodwork without covering the entire ground of all color effects, from fresco painting, upholstery, furniture, draperies, etc. Again, to give detailed suggestions as to arrangement of colors on woodwork, would

require some specimen illustrations; and, once begun, there would be no place to stop.

We may, in a general way, say that it has been the custom to use glossy, white paint, or graining in imitation of woods, both of which are very bad in many instances; white, because it is hard and cold in appearance and lacks character; graining, because it is an imitation of the genuine in many houses, and is frequently a very poor imitation. In painting a room, the woodwork should be in colors which will harmonize with the wall decorations, either matching the colors on the walls or using some contrasting color that will harmonize nicely. If you are not positive which are the right colors to contrast nicely with other portions of the room and make a perfect harmony, we advise using colors similar to those employed in the wall decoration. Paint the inside of the windows, or that part of the frame nearest the sash, light color; the sash and the flat part

or face of the frame, dark color. If the frame is cased with a molding on the edge next the wall, paint it the light color, as the gradation of color between the dark on the frame and the general color of the wall is more pleasing to the eye, and is not as strong a contrast as a dark color will make. Paint the base dark, and the molding at the top of the base light color, the sunken part of the panels of doors dark and the stiles light. We have noticed that in many instances the panels are painted light and the stiles dark, which is entirely wrong, as the stile is the most prominent part of the door, and of necessity must receive the most light. But as most of the woodwork now in use is perfectly flat, with the exception of grooves or beads run in them, we would advise the use of three colors. Paint high lights light color, shadows dark, and in grooves or on beads, use a contrasting color, or one that will harmonize well, and at the same time

make the woodwork look lighter, always being careful to use a receding color in the grooves, and an advancing or stationary color on the beads. Black has been frequently used in parlors, and with a little gold leaf it makes a very good color for a room furnished with a variety of furniture of different colors, as it will harmonize with all colors. Although artists prefer not to use black unless absolutely necessary, yet it often makes a very fine room, but should be used nowhere except in a parlor or library. Sitting rooms look well in olives and olive browns. Dining rooms look best in warm olives and browns, red on beads or lines of same color. Chambers should be done in lighter colors generally than ordinary living rooms. Blue rooms are generally painted blue, with the beads of the same color darkened somewhat. Blue woodwork is bad enough in light tints, without making it worse by darkening the beads. If the work must be blue, make

the beads a warm gray, and the room will look a hundred per cent. better. Halls, where the walls have been painted or papered in dark colors, paint the woodwork with some strong contrasting color. In rooms or halls where the woodwork is painted and the decoration of the walls is to be changed, by all means change the color of the woodwork, as that is an important item. When the walls look well enough, and you would like to have a different appearance given to your room without much expense, change the color of the woodwork. If it has been painted to match the walls, try contrasting colors and you will be agreeably surprised at the difference a little paint, judiciously applied, will make.

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